

VZCZCXRO5817
RR RUEHAG RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL
DE RUEHBW #0845/01 2581129
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 151129Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0208
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMCSUU/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BELGRADE 000845

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS
NOFORN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/09/15

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: SERBIA/TURKEY: TURKISH FM'S BELGRADE VISIT HERALDS NEW ERA
IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

CLASSIFIED BY: Deborah Mennuti, Political Chief, DOS, POL; REASON:
1.4(D)

[1](#)1. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Ankara.

Summary

[1](#)2. (C) The late July visit of Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu to Belgrade marked a significant step forward in the bilateral relationship between Serbia and Turkey. Amid agreements on deeper economic cooperation and increased Turkish developmental assistance, the two sides defined their relationship as a strategic partnership that would include policy coordination on regional issues such as Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as Turkish assistance in Sandzak, the sensitive Muslim-dominant region of southwest Serbia. While the Serbian leadership is keen to use Turkish assistance in the economic and security realms, Belgrade is keeping a close eye on "Albanian interests" in Ankara and what Serbia considers potentially opaque Turkish aid activities that could exacerbate historical sensitivities between the two countries. End Summary.

Turkish FM Visits Belgrade, Novi Pazar

[1](#)3. (SBU) Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's July 23-24 visit to Serbia was marked by promises of strategic partnership and deeper economic cooperation. President Tadic announced after his meeting with Davutoglu that the two sides has signed a memorandum of understanding to allow the Turkish development agency TIKa to operate in Serbia by the end of 2009. Tadic expressed confidence in the great potential for intensifying economic cooperation and joint efforts on infrastructure projects, such as completing Corridor 10 and building a highway between Serbia and Montenegro

via Sandzak. Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic described Davutoglu's visit as marking the "best possible relations between Serbia and Turkey and a strategic partnership of the two countries." Noting that the two sides agreed to disagree about Kosovo independence, Davutoglu said that both sides were ready for Turkish investment in Serbia, particularly in support of developing Sandzak as a "bridge of friendship" between the two countries.

¶4. (SBU) Following his Belgrade meetings with Tadic, Jeremic, PM Cvetkovic, and Parliament Speaker Dejanovic, Davutoglu and Jeremic on July 24 flew by helicopter to Novi Pazar for meetings with local political and religious leaders. The two foreign ministers presided over a public "reconciliation" between longtime rival Bosniak party leaders, Minister for Labor and Social Policy Rasim Ljajic and Minister without Portfolio Sulejman Ugljanin (septel). Jeremic touted the historic occasion of the four ministers sitting together behind a single table to discuss economic projects and infrastructure development in the Sandzak region. Davutoglu, along with deputy reis-el-ulema of the Islamic Community of Turkey Mehmed Gormez, later met separately with rival Islamic community leaders Muamer Zukorlic and Adem Zilkic without reaching any breakthroughs on resolving the longstanding and occasionally violent dispute between Zukorlic's Islamic Community in Serbia and Zilkic's Islamic Community of Serbia.

Belgrade's New Outlook on Turkish Ties

BELGRADE 00000845 002 OF 003

¶5. (C) Davutoglu's visit to Serbia, including a stop in the historically sensitive region of Sandzak, was widely considered a success; various elements of Serbian leadership scrambled to take credit for Serbia's new relations with Turkey. Speaking to the Charge before Davutoglu's visit, Defense Minister Sutanovac claimed credit for the idea of reaching out to Turkey via a successful mil-mil relationship designed to stabilize the Sandzak region and counter the threat of Saudi influence. Presidential foreign policy advisor Aleksandar Knezevic told us that the opening to Turkey was the result of a long-term effort by the Serbian mission in Ankara and that Serbia was eager to use Turkey's experience with Islam in a secular state to address issues in Serbia's Muslim community, including "cooling the hotheads" in the rival Islamic communities. Melina Krstinic, desk officer for Turkey at the Serbian MFA, told us in late July that the impetus for the new "strategic partnership" between the two countries was arrived at jointly by Tadic and Jeremic during their mid-July visit to Sharm al-Sheik summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, where the "open atmosphere" enabled the Serbian and Turkish sides to completely rethink their strategic relationship.

¶6. (C) Our Serbian interlocutors believe that this new strategic partnership is only beginning and will continue to deepen in the months ahead. Minister of Economy Mladjan Dinkic signed a free trade agreement in Ankara on June 1. Sutanovac said he expected exchanges of visits, including the CHOD, with Turkey in the upcoming months. Krstinic told us that Davutoglu had told the Serbian side to prepare the project details seeking Turkish funding that could be signed as early as October when Turkish President Gul is expected to visit Belgrade. Construction on these infrastructure projects could begin as early as the end of this year, and several Turkish companies in August and September expressed interest in bidding on Serbian highway tenders. Krstinic added that Tadic agreed to Davutoglu's proposal to establish a new Islamic cultural center in Serbia that would assist in showing Serbian tolerance of local Muslims. In addition, Tadic, Cvetkovic and Davutoglu discussed ways Turkey and Serbia could work together to have "a positive influence" on the situation in

Bosnia-Herzegovina. MFA Political Director Borko Stefanovic told the Charge on September 3 that Gul will visit Belgrade on October 126.

17. (S//NF) Despite voicing optimism for closer relations, Serbia's enthusiasm is moderated somewhat by unhappiness with Turkish support for Kosovo, suspicions of Turkish intentions, and concerns about TIKA's activities. Describing the absence of any open issues besides Kosovo, Krstinic said Tadic did not get a firm response to his request to Davutoglu that Turkey refrain from giving further support to Kosovo for membership in regional organizations. Krstinic noted that Belgrade was also worried that unspecified "Albanian interests" in the Turkish Parliament would succeed in blocking ratification of the free trade agreement with Turkey. Knezevic said that Belgrade would watch TIKA's activities closely due to concerns about non-transparency, lack of coordination with Serbian authorities, and "inappropriate activities," a possible reference to Serbian concern that TIKA is an arm of Turkish security services.

Evolving Turkish Views on Serbia, Sandzak

BELGRADE 00000845 003 OF 003

18. (SBU) For his part, Davutoglu traced the thaw in relations between Serbia and Turkey to Jeremic's March 2009 visit to Ankara during which Jeremic first declared a "strategic partnership" with Turkey and thus signaled the opening of a new phase in bilateral relations. In an op-ed published on the eve of his visit in the daily "Politika," Davutoglu described Turkey and Serbia as "neighboring countries" well-positioned to bring stability to the Balkans.

19. (C) Turkey's ambassador to Serbia, Suha Umar, voiced optimism on the prospects for realizing this vision of strategic partnership. Noting that negotiations over a free trade agreement between Turkey and Serbia had lasted seven years, Umar told the Charge on July 30 that he assessed that bilateral relations were now at a better position than before Turkey's recognition of Kosovo independence last year. (As partial evidence of this, Umar showed the Charge a picture of a grinning Jeremic sitting at Umar's desk as a portrait of Ataturk loomed behind.) Umar said that Jeremic and Davutoglu talked at length about ways to cooperate on Bosnia-Herzegovina and jointly promote regional cooperation. Discussing earlier Serbian distrust of Turkish involvement in Serbia and Sandzak, Umar said that Belgrade was now more willing to seek Turkish assistance in calming the rival Islamic communities in Sandzak. Umar noted that Davutoglu realized following his visit the sensitive dynamics of the conflict between Zukorlic and Zilkic; he also realized that he could no longer count on Reis Mustafa Ceric in Sarajevo (under whose authority Zukorlic falls) to be a positive influence on Zukorlic, because Ceric and Zukorlic were now "playing the same game" of agitating Bosniaks for political gain.

Comment

110. (C) The thaw in Serbian-Turkish relations over the past few months is a welcome step forward in overcoming differences on Kosovo and a sensitive historical legacy of Ottoman and Turkish influence often exploited by Serbian nationalists during the wars

of the 1990s. Looking beyond past prejudices, Belgrade seems positioned to welcome Turkish assistance in needed economic development projects and constructive political influence among parties in Sandzak and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The latest in a series of "strategic partnerships" trumpeted by Belgrade, closer cooperation between Serbia and Turkey could in fact lead to tangible positive results that would bode well for future regional cooperation. End Comment.
BRUSH